Vehicle Safety

227.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

It is the policy of this office to maintain and operate the vehicles assigned to this facility in a lawful and safe manner. The Office utilizes office-owned motor vehicles for a variety of applications. To maintain a system of accountability and ensure that office-owned vehicles are used appropriately, regulations relating to the use of these vehicles have been established. The term “office-owned” as used in this section also refers to any vehicle leased or rented by the Office.

227.2 POLICY

The Thurston County Sheriff's Office provides vehicles for official business use and may assign take-home vehicles based on its determination of operational efficiency, economic impact to the Office, tactical deployments, and other considerations.

227.3 USE AND SECURITY OF OFFICE VEHICLES

All staff members who operate office-owned or leased vehicles must comply with all applicable state laws and must possess a valid driver license endorsed for the type of vehicle operated.

A list of individuals who are authorized to drive office vehicles shall be maintained by the Office. The list shall be updated regularly to ensure that only qualified personnel who are in possession of a current and appropriately endorsed operator’s license are on the list.

227.3.1 USE OF SEAT BELTS

The use of seat belts and other safety restraints significantly reduces the chance of death or injury in case of a traffic collision. This policy establishes guidelines for seat belt use to promote maximum operator and passenger safety, thus reducing the possibility of death or injury as the result of a motor vehicle collision. This policy will apply to all members operating or riding in office vehicles.

All members shall wear properly adjusted safety restraints when operating or riding in a seat equipped with restraints, in any vehicle owned, leased, or rented by this office, while on- or off-duty, or in any privately owned vehicle while on-duty. The member driving such a vehicle shall ensure that all other occupants, including non-members, are also properly restrained.

Exceptions to the requirement to wear safety restraints may be made only in exceptional situations where, due to unusual circumstances, wearing a seat belt would endanger the member or the public. Members must be prepared to justify any deviation from this requirement.

Whenever possible, inmates should be secured in a prisoner restraint system or, when a prisoner restraint system is not available, by seat belts. The inmate should be in the seating position for which seat belts have been provided by the vehicle manufacturer. The prisoner restraint system is not intended to be a substitute for handcuffs or other appendage restraints.

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No person shall operate a leased or office-owned vehicle in which the seat belt in the driver's position is inoperable. No person shall be transported in a seated position in which the seat belt is inoperable.

No person shall modify, remove, deactivate, or otherwise tamper with the vehicle safety belts, except for vehicle maintenance and repair staff who shall do so only with the express authorization of the Sheriff.

Members who discover an inoperable restraint system shall report the defect to the appropriate supervisor. Prompt action will be taken to replace or repair the system.

227.3.2 VEHICLE SECURITY

Office vehicles will be locked and the keys will be secured when not in use. The staff will make every effort to ensure that the vehicles are parked in a secure location.

Under no circumstances will inmates be allowed to operate a vehicle or have possession of any vehicle keys. Inmate workers who are assigned to clean vehicles must be closely supervised by staff.

The loss of any vehicle key shall be promptly reported, in writing, to the on-duty supervisor.

227.4 VEHICLE INSPECTIONS

All office-owned vehicles are subject to inspection and or search at any time by a supervisor. No member assigned to or operating such vehicle shall be entitled to any expectation of privacy with respect to the vehicle or any of its contents, regardless of who owns the contents.

227.5 COLLISION DAMAGE, ABUSE, AND MISUSE

When a leased or office-owned vehicle is involved in a traffic collision, the involved member shall promptly notify a supervisor. A traffic collision report shall be filed with the agency having jurisdiction. The member shall complete this office's vehicle collision form.

When a traffic collision involves a leased or office-owned vehicle or when a member of this office is an involved driver in a collision that occurs in this jurisdiction, and the collision results in serious injury or death or potentially involves any criminal charge, an outside agency should be summoned to handle the investigation. If the member is incapable of completing this office's vehicle collision form, a supervisor shall complete the form.

Any damage to a vehicle that was not caused by a traffic collision shall be immediately reported during the shift in which the damage was discovered. It shall be documented in memorandum format and forwarded to the Shift Supervisor. An administrative investigation will be conducted to determine if there is any vehicle abuse or misuse. If it is determined that misuse or abuse was a result of negligent conduct or operation, appropriate disciplinary action may result.

227.6 TOLL ROAD USE

Authorized on-duty emergency vehicles are exempt from incurring toll road charges. An authorized emergency vehicle is an on-duty vehicle of the office which is equipped with emergency lights

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and siren and used to respond to emergency calls (WAC 468-270-030; WAC 468-270-085; WAC 468-270-105).

To avoid unnecessary toll road violation charges, all members operating office-owned vehicles on a toll road shall adhere to the following:

(a) Members operating office-owned vehicles that are not authorized emergency vehicles shall stop and pay the appropriate toll charge.

(b) Members may submit for reimbursement from the Office for any toll fees.

(c) Members in unauthorized emergency vehicles passing through a toll plaza or booth during a response to an emergency shall draft a memo to his/her supervisor within five working days, explaining the circumstances.

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